

sold to the city in 1873, making it the first African American school in the city's system, one bound to emerge as a leading institution for black students. The school suffered several fires over its lifetime, including three arson attempts in 1897. As an example of the school's importance to the community, its commencement exercises for 1902 were held in Thalian Hall. The school benefited from professional staff and excellent teachers and throughout the first decades of the 20th century, the city dedicated funds regularly to improvements to the school's facilities. The school thrived and, in 1914, a new school was constructed as the Williston Primary and Industrial School, one which served elementary students as well as older students offering classes on agriculture, science, and building trades. New facilities were built subsequent to the 1914 building and the school prospered as a site for improved educational opportunities for black students throughout the South. The school closed amid controversy in the 1970's only to be reopened later as an integrated school.⁴

Another prominent school for African Americans in Wilmington was Gregory Institute. Gregory also was sponsored by the American Missionary Association after the Civil War. It emerged as the single school to which the AMA dedicated the bulk of its funds locally over the years. After Williston was sold to the city in 1873, the AMA continued its work at what would become Gregory Institute. During the 1870's the school was funded entirely by the AMA and averaged around 100 students who paid a monthly tuition of one dollar. By the 1880's the school had grown to 200 students and a new building was constructed near the new Congregational Church. The school was named in honor of benefactor J. J. Howard Gregory who donated funds for construction and teacher salaries. The AMA maintained its connection to the school and sought to staff the school with bright, young teachers from northern cities. Since the school was privately owned and operated, it continued to prosper whereas the public schools were forced to occupy dilapidated buildings and provide lower pay to teachers. The school sought to produce teachers for other schools or to prepare its students for collegiate study elsewhere and became known as Gregory Normal School. Despite appeals by local leaders and others from throughout the country, the school closed in 1921. At that time, there were as many as 2,500 black school-age children in the county but only 800 were served by the school district.⁵

⁴ Reaves, *Strength Through Struggle*, 155-164; Timothy B. Tyson, *Blood Done Sign My Name* (New York: Crown Publishers, 2004), 257; John L. Godwin, *Black Wilmington and the North Carolina Way: Portrait of a Community in the Era of Civil Rights Protest* (Lanham, Maryland: University Press of America, 2000) 225, 236.

⁵ Reaves, *Strength Through Struggle*, 164 -169.